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The Director of Central Intelligence  
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC-02275/88

23 June 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: Distribution

FROM:

Assistant National Intelligence Officer for USSR

SUBJECT:

OUTLOOK FOR THE SOVIET PARTY CONFERENCE: AN  
INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY FORECAST

The four-day national party conference that convenes in Moscow next Tuesday (28 June) will be a major test of Gorbachev's power and the future of his reform program. Intelligence community representatives met on 21 June to discuss our expectations for the conference.

BOTTOM LINE. It does not appear that the conference will give Gorbachev the decisive breakthrough against conservative opponents of reform in the party that he and his allies originally hoped for. Indeed, a minority of community analysts believe Gorbachev has been stalemated in the pre-conference battles that determined the selection of delegates and the authority of the conference. But most analysts believe that the conference will nonetheless give Gorbachev an important boost by demonstrating leadership support for a package of political reform measures with potentially profound impact on the Communist party and the Soviet system.

**POLICY INITIATIVES.** The conference will focus on "democratization" of the Soviet political system and society. Debate is likely to center in particular on reform of the party itself. At a minimum we believe the meeting will endorse the substance of the "theses" published last month and it may well strengthen ambiguous language in the theses that could allow conservatives to undermine the intent of controversial reforms.

-- [ ] suggests that reformers have failed in their effort to empower the conference to actually amend party statutes, and the meeting is likely instead to be limited to making recommendations for a subsequent party congress to consider.

-- Gorbachev may use his speech to mobilize reform supporters and he could propose initiatives that go well beyond those authorized in the theses. But the test of his success will be the extent to which any such proposals are endorsed by the conference.

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**PROSPECTS FOR LEADERSHIP CHANGE.** Even Gorbachev's supporters have lately been seeking to reduce expectations that we will see major changes in the top leadership. While minor changes are possible and even probable, we now believe it unlikely that "second secretary" Ligachev or other key conservative figures will be removed from the Politburo.

-- Any leadership changes made are likely to be announced at a plenum which some Embassy sources predict will follow the conference. The conference itself does not have such authority.

-- Many, although not all, community analysts believe that Ligachev's position in the leadership has nonetheless been eroded and look for him to be removed or kicked upstairs later in the year.

The conference will reportedly not be empowered to elect a new Central Committee, but we believe that it is likely to replace some or all of the "dead souls"--some 57 members of the body elected at the last congress in 1986 who have since died or been removed from office. Doing so would improve Gorbachev's support in the 300-odd member body, where many analysts believe the opposition to reform is centered.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR GORBACHEV AND HIS AGENDA** Most community analysts believe that a conference with the sort of results we anticipate would represent an important boost for Gorbachev and the reform process.

-- While no breakthrough--his conservative opponents would live to fight another day--the conference would symbolize the rapidly expanding reform debate and legitimize a reinvigorated and broadened attack on Stalin-era dogmas and institutions.

-- Some community analysts find this majority view too benign. They believe Gorbachev has essentially been stalemated in the runup to the conference--as evident in the ability of the party apparatus to control the selection of delegates. They argue that even if Gorbachev gets "half a loaf," as we anticipate, it will be insufficient to impress the fence-sitters who continue to block reform in the central ministries and party committees, and insufficient to stave off the impending doom which they see facing perestroika.

**A FAILURE SCENARIO.** Any results less than we anticipate from the conference would clearly spell trouble for Gorbachev. If the debate over the theses before and during the conference produces no discernable strengthening of its provisions for party reform, it will be widely seen in Moscow as a setback. The failure of the conference to approve any changes in the Politburo or Central Committee would be an even more serious setback.

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A BREAKTHROUGH? Leadership changes or policy initiatives beyond those that we anticipate in this assessment could turn the conference into a watershed event in Soviet political history--consolidating Gorbachev's grip on the leadership and presaging an accelerated assault against perestroika's opponents:

-- Ligachev's removal from the Secretariat--perhaps in anticipation of a move to the Presidency--would be a decisive step for Gorbachev, perhaps comparable to the victory over the "anti-party group" that consolidated Khrushchev's hold on power in 1957. The elevation of cadres secretary Razumovskiy to full Politburo membership would be less dramatic but would further undermine Ligachev's status and would almost certainly indicate his loss of "second secretary" status. It would also be a major plus for Gorbachev if the meeting is able to reach outside the ranks of existing candidate members to replace "dead souls" on the Central Committee or if it is able to "pack" the body by electing a sizable number of new members.

-- A significant strengthening of provisions in the draft "theses" designed to reduce the ability of the party apparatus to interfere in day-to-day management of the society and the economy would indicate a significant shift in the balance of power in the party in favor of the reformers. This would be especially so if the conference proves to have the authority to make corresponding changes in the party statutes, not simply to recommend changes to the next congress.

We plan to convene community representatives again on 6 July to make a preliminary assessment of the results of the party.

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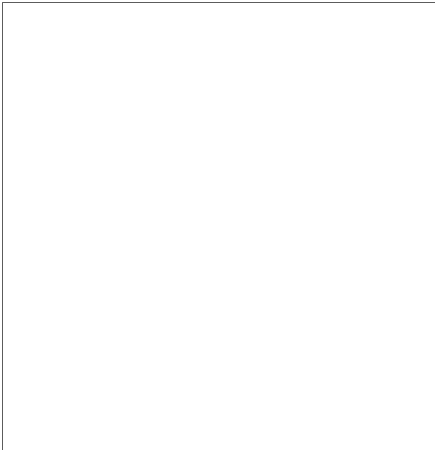
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